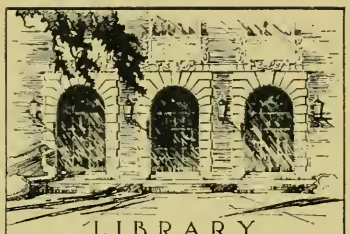

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MR. SANDFORD

AND

THE UNIVERSITY SERMON.

A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

REV. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR,

BY THE

REV. JOHN W. BURGON, M.A.,

FELLOW OF ORIEL, AND VICAR OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN'S.

Oxford:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

1865.

This Letter is occasioned by a pamphlet of exactly the same bulk which appeared on or about the 25th of November, entitled,—"The University Sermon and College Services. A Letter addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, by Charles Waldegrave Sandford, M.A., Senior Censor of Christ Church, Oxford; Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of London; and late Whitehall Preacher."

J. W. B.

Oriel, *Dec.* 8.

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Oriel, *Dec.* 5, 1865.

My dear Vice-Chancellor,

Mr. Sandford's printed letter to yourself, which I received ten days ago, did not seem to me to require any reply. Finding however that he has procured that the subject shall be brought before the Council, I think it my duty to offer some remarks on his proposal that the Morning University Sermon at my Church shall be transferred from 10.30 to 12 o'clock. A very few words will suffice to shew that his suggestion *could not* be complied with, even if it were thought desirable that it should. And this is the only point with which I feel called upon to deal. But before I lay down my pen, I will also shew that the proposal is in itself utterly unreasonable, impracticable, and mischievous.

On Sacrament Sundays (i. e. on every other Sunday), I am unable, even under the most favourable circumstances, to dismiss the congregation in less than two hours and a quarter. I invite your attention to what took place last Sunday. Mr. Wickham's sermon being short, our Service began at 11.30 punctually. *Three* persons assisted me at the Sacrament: and there were but 49 Communicants. Even so, Divine Service was not over till a quarter to 2: nor could I leave the Vestry until the congregation had assembled for the afternoon.

It follows, that if the University Sermon were fixed for 12, the latest possible moment at which the parochial Service could commence would be 9.30 a.m.

By this arrangement, the bell might generally begin to ring for the University Sermon at a quarter to 12,—never before.

And this obviously settles the question. I should altogether decline to request the large Congregation which now comes to my Church at 11.30, to come instead *at so early an hour as* 10 *o'clock*. But even were I to begin at 10, the preliminaries to the University Sermon could not be completed (without disturbing my Communicants) before 1 o'clock in the day.

Here I might close the discussion. My respect for your office and sincere regard for your person induces me to add yet a few remarks.

I. Whether the Morning University Sermon began at 12, at 12.30, or at 1 o'clock, it would be practically impossible to have any *afternoon* University Sermon. This, in itself, viewing Mr. Sandford's proposal from the academic point of view, ought to be fatal to it.

Easy it is for those who are seldom seen in the University Church, to express their readiness to sacrifice the second Sermon. They would not perhaps object to the suppression of the University pulpit altogether.

II. But,—*What* has arisen to create the supposed necessity for transferring the University Morning Sermon from 10.30 to 12 o'clock? Does not morning prayer in College Chapels at 8, leave time enough for breakfast before half-past 10?

The necessity is declared to arise out of the practice (now, happily, growing common) of a weekly celebration in College Chapels. But it is not explained why men desirous of weekly Communion at an early hour, should not rise at 7 o'clock to receive it. It is alleged however that weak and sickly persons find it impos-

sible to rise so early; and that the hour is inconvenient even to persons in robust health.

Very likely. But it is impossible to combine *everything*. A great privilege ought to be deemed worth a small inconvenience: and the effort of rising an hour earlier in order to communicate, is an excellent test of earnestness. It seems right to state that in the two years during which I have been Vicar of St. Mary's, I have not found it necessary to be absent at seven o'clock, while resident, either on Sundays or Saints' days, more than once or twice. I may truly add that there is nothing requisite on my side but *a will*. What *I* can do *always*, others I suppose can do *sometimes*. No one, at all events, can pretend a hardship. As for attempting to square the hours of the whole University with the convenience of a few weak and sickly persons, who (it is said) *can* rise at 8, but *cannot* rise at 7,—it is clearly unreasonable.

III. But Mr. Sandford further thinks that Sermons ought to be preached in all College Chapels. I agree with him: and think that *good* College Sermons are very good things. We have sermons in Oriel. We had them at Worcester. They are common enough in the evening, elsewhere. How do they interfere with the actual hours of the University Sermons?

"By our present system," (says Mr. Sandford,) "Undergraduates who never attend University Sermons are left with nothing given them to occupy their thoughts from 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, when the Morning Service is over, till 4 o'clock, or even later in the afternoon, when the Evening Service begins. No wonder that Sunday is in some Colleges a favourite day for breakfast parties and luncheons, and for idling in the College quadrangles." (p. 4.)

"The need of some change," (presently adds the ingenuous writer,) "has been brought home to me more forcibly, it may be, than to others, because I live in a large quadrangle, containing nearly a hundred sets of rooms, all, except my own, occupied by Undergraduates." (p. 7.)

Here then, at last, the secret comes out! And so, to speak plainly,—In order that the Undergraduates of Christ Church, "who never attend University Sermons," may have "something given them to occupy their thoughts from 10 to 4" on Sundays; and further, in order to check their breakfast parties, and luncheons, and "idlings in the College quadrangle,"—Mr. Sandford proposes that the Morning University Sermon shall be at 12 o'clock, and the Afternoon Sermon (for aught he cares) "abolished." (p. 7.) "I cannot but feel," (he proceeds, with amusing *naïveté*,) "that for the success of this proposal, it would have been better that it had been advocated by a member of another Society." It would indeed. May I be so bold as to suggest that a simpler and more obvious, as well as far more efficacious remedy for the local nuisance of which Mr. Sandford complains, might easily be devised, than the ponderous plan which he advocates?

IV. But lastly, his scheme would be productive of nothing but mischief. Let us see exactly what it amounts to.

He proposes that every College in Oxford shall adopt the plan of (1) Early weekly Celebration, (2) Breakfast at 9, (3) Morning Prayer and Sermon at 10. All this is absolutely necessary to the symmetry of Mr. Sandford's scheme. And pray notice the awkward dilemma which inevitably follows.

Colleges must either accept his programme; or they must decline to do so.

α. If they declined,—utter desecration of Sunday would follow. In Colleges where discipline is slack, men would lie in bed till 10; and the breakfast party would overtake the luncheon party. Some Undergraduates would eat and drink, or "idle in the College quadrangle." Others with a better instinct would go out for a walk. How many would attend the University Sermon *then?*

β. But if Mr. Sandford's scheme were generally adopted, and every College on Sunday morning "undertook to provide a Sermon" for its Undergraduate members,—what else would or *could* follow but that *no Undergraduate would be able to go to the University Sermon at all?*

To exhibit this extraordinary proposal in its true bearing, and to state it in familiar language,—In order to prevent Sunday at Christ Church from being any longer "a favourite day for breakfast parties and luncheons, and for idling in the College quadrangle," it is recommended by the Senior Censor of that College that *both the University Sermons be abolished.* . . . I think I have said enough.

I am, my dear Vice-Chancellor,
Yours most faithfully,
JOHN W. BURGON.

P.S. Since I am on this subject, I will venture to offer a brief suggestion of my own.

What really calls for change is not *the hour* at which the Morning University Sermon is preached, but *the system on which the University Preacher is appointed.* In nothing is a thorough reform more loudly

called for than in respect of the Cycle of Preachers; and I venture respectfully to recommend the subject to the attention of the Council. Why 14 turns out of 33 should be assigned to Christ Church, I profess myself wholly unable to discover.

In parish pulpits, I hold that the sermon ought to be delivered *by the parish Priest.* But in the University pulpit, I am equally convinced that it ought to be preached *by persons who have the gift of Preaching.* Let this point be attended to,—in other words, *let the Preaching at St. Mary's be improved,*—and let the Sermons be kept within forty-five minutes; let something be done in the way of promoting attendance, and let those who now sign memorials to the Vice-Chancellor become regular frequenters of the University Church instead, as well as active in influencing their pupils to attend also,—and I am confident that the only difficulty will soon be how to provide sufficient accommodation at St. Mary's for those who will desire to come to Church on Sunday mornings at half-past ten o'clock, and in the afternoon at two.

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